****Upper Wapsi River WMA Meeting

Twin Ponds Nature Center

March 7th, 2023

1:30 pm

**Minutes**

The meeting was called to order by WMA Chairman, John Kurtz at 1:30 pm.

Motion to approve the agenda was made by, Orlan Love and seconded by David Lehman. Motion Passed.

Attendees: Steve Breitbach, *Chickasaw County Supervisor*, John Kurtz, *Buchanan County Supervisor,* Mike O’Laughlin, *City of Independence*, Chris Eibey, *Delaware SWCD,* Ross Evelsizer, *Northeast Iowa RC&D*, Tori Nimrod, *Northeast Iowa RC&D*, Kristina McBurney, *District Representative for Ashley Hinson,* Orlan Love, *City of Quasqueton*, David Lehman, *Bremer County Conservation*, Bruce Lehmann, *Fayette County Supervisor*, Ben Bonar, *Buchanan County Conservation*, Randy Leach, *City of Fredericksburg,* Rick Wulfekuhle, *Buchanan County EM,* Rodger Erickson, *Chickasaw NRCS*, Randy Miller, *Chickasaw County Supervisor*, Ray Armbrecht, *City of Fredericksburg*, Chad Humpal, *Chickasaw County Conservation*, Kip Ladage, *Bremer County SWCD*, Annina Rupe, *Ducks Unlimited*, Mike Shannon, *Ducks Unlimited*, Sean Dolan, *Buchanan County SWCD*, Sydney, Dennis Goemaat, *Linn County*, Milt Owen, Alex Schaffer, *Iowa Soybean Association*.

Motion to approve the Minutes from November 29th, 2022 Meeting was made by Randy Leach and seconded by Orlan Love. Motion Passed.

**New Business**

**Ducks Unlimited Water Quality Project - Mike Shannon and Annina Rupe:**

Mike Shannon, Manager of Conservation Programs for Ducks Unlimited began the presentation outlining the role Ducks Unlimited plays in watershed conservation. Majority of Ducks Unlimited programs are located within duck migratory tracks throughout the Nation, which includes the prairie pothole region and corridors along major rivers. In Iowa, Ducks Unlimited has conserved over 82,000 acres of land since 1985. Majority of their work is improving and creating wetland habitats to provide quality bird habitat, which in turn also improves water quality.

Mike passed the presentation to Annina Rupe, GIS Analyst for DU who summarized a recent project in identifying wetland sites using aerial imagery and GIS. In order to identify potential locations for wetlands on the landscape they utilized LiDAR data which provides a high resolution elevation layer where they can identify existing depressions on the landscape. Depressions on the landscape better the probability that the area contains wetland conditions already. The model DU developed utilized multiple data layers to narrow down the selected landscape depressions based on wetland characteristics. Characteristics such as if the depression is on agricultural land, what type of soils are in the depression, is there a wetland identified in that area already. Once the depressions are ranked in the model a Biologist further investigates highly ranked sites and provides an additional ranking to further narrow down their list of potential projects. Remaining highly ranked sites are selected to begin landowner contact and engineering. So far, this project has taken place in the Boon, South Skunk, and North Racoon watersheds, which area all located in the prairie pothole region. Annina and Mike explained DU would investigate and be interested in project located in floodplain wetlands as well. These areas serve as a critical resource for migratory birds. Mike and Annina’s presentation is attached with these minutes. Please contact them in you have any questions.

Annina Rupe: arupe@ducks.org Mike Shannon: mshannon@ducks.org

**Iowa Soybean Association – Alex Schaffer, Field Services Program Manager:** Schaffer presented about his project called ‘Conservation Cropping Systems Demonstration Project’. The goal of this project is to develop a farmer group to discuss issues related to management of no-till and cover crop systems in the area. This project originated in the Crane Creek subwatershed of the Upper Wapsi, after not receiving enough trial farmers, the area was explanted to include a variety of counties in NE Iowa. The project works to identify and execute farm demonstrations and trial fields for cover crop and no-till management systems. They use these trials to collect water quality and soil health data, as well as economic data. Projects also work to create an advisory team where farmers can ask questions to a variety of infield conservation experts. Examples of the types of field trials include incorporating cover crops, using no-till, reducing fertilizer usage, and using biologicals.

This project is still going on, if landowners within the project area are interested in participating they should contact Alex with ISA. Alex explained many reasons why a farmer should participate in an on-farm research program. Opportunity to be compensated for learning something new and trying a new management style. Farmers can identify cost savings on their ground, and network with other farmers in Iowa experimenting on their farms. For more information, the presentation is attached with these minutes, or contact Alex Schaffer via email aschaffer@iasoybeans.com.

**Watershed Coordinator Update - Ross and Tori:**

Tori Nimrod began by outlining results from the 2022 water sampling season. This was the 7th sampling year for the Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed. Twenty-two locations across the watershed are sampled between the months of May through October. Samples are sent to Coe College for analysis. Over all samples for 2022 were consistent with previous years’ data. Nimrod outlined high average levels of nitrate at the Bremer 14 and both Delaware county locations. Several locations are also high in E.coli. Values of over 1,000CFU/100ml raised concerns with board members present. Further investigation into these sites might provide useful information as to the cause for these thigh E.coli levels. Additional water sampling data can be viewed via the Upper Wapsi Website at <https://upperwapsi.org/plan/challenges-and-opportunities/water-quality/> This data is useful when applying for funding sources in the watershed and for creating a database of water quality data. Nimrod will begin to contact volunteers for the 2023 sampling year, which will begin in May.

As a part of the duties outlined for the Watershed Coordinators, Tori and Ross have been involved in helping develop content for presentation to local legislatures. They have been working with other WMA Coordinators and partners in the state to advocate for funding for WMAs in Iowa. While, little progress has been made in allocating funding at the State level, the documents developed provide a valuable resource in spreading the word of the work WMAs in Iowa do.

Ross Evelsizer also summarized this year’s fundraising efforts to continue the work of Northeast Iowa RC&D as Upper Wapsi WMA Coordinators. So far they have received just over $3,000 of their $18,000 goal. Funds raised is about enough to do water sampling for the year, but does not provide funding for any other coordinator duties. Ross reminded board members present to reach out to their respective boards about the donation, and to make sure that if an invoice is needed that it be requested from the RC&D. The RC&D will not send out invoices unless they are requested.

Nimrod concluded the coordinator update, by giving a project update. The City of Independence chose to withdraw their application for the Water Quality Initiative (WQI) Grant program at this time because they could not commit the match needed. The project has preliminary designs completed, which makes it a great option for any upcoming funding sources that come up in the future. The previous grant period was at a time when new City Council members were joining and some were leaving, which may have led to the push back in funding at this time. Rick Wulfekuhle, Buchanan County Emergency Management, mentioned another grant opportunity that he was going to reach out to the City about.

Chickasaw, Bremer, Buchanan and other counties in the State have received funding from the DNR to install stream name signs along county roads. Chickasaw County signs have been delivered and will be installed this spring. These signs are an educational resource that allows landowners and visitors to make a connection to the water body they live by or are utilizing.

* ***Next Meeting Date:*** Tori, will send out potential meeting dates for beginning of June.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:02: Motion made by Dave Lehman, Second by Kip Ladage. Motion Passed.